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ABSTRACT

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD) is designed to assist low-performing schools, especially Title I schools. Grants are awarded through statewide competitions. This report offers the findings of Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning's analysis of the application process and characteristics of first-round applicants in the Central Region states. The characteristics of the schools granted funding were analyzed to determine whether CSRD funding is reaching the populations intended by the program. The data specifying school characteristics were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data. The types of technical assistance provided to potential applicants, the priorities in scoring applications, the major differences between successful and unsuccessful proposals, and the weaknesses of unsuccessful proposals were assessed. The success rate of low-achieving schools in obtaining funding and how this rate compares to other schools were also addressed. Rural and urban schools were compared by examining the percentage of schools that applied for funds, as well as the percentage that received funds. Analysis indicated substantial differences among states in the application process, specifically in the number of reviewers participating, the scoring rubrics applied, and the average funds awarded. Successful applicants had slightly fewer students and teachers, served a greater percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch, and more often demonstrated student need through involvement in Title I and school-improvement efforts. (RKJ)

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CENTRAL REGION REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In FY 1998, Congress appropriated $145 million for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program. This three-year program is designed to assist low-performing schools, especially Title I schools, in their school reform efforts. Individual schools receive a minimum of $50,000 per year, renewable for up to three years, for training, technical assistance, instructional materials, and parent and community outreach activities. Funds are made available to states and grants are awarded to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) through statewide competitions. Schools are required to adopt an externally developed model or develop their own internal model of comprehensive school reform.

This study examined several policy questions about the characteristics of the LEAs which are submitting applications and the distinguishing characteristics of the proposals which are funded to determine whether CSRD funding is reaching the schools and populations of students intended by the program. The main research questions are as follows:

- What types of technical assistance did states provide potential applicants?
- What were state priorities for CSRD programs as reflected in their scoring rubrics for applications?
- What are the major differences between successful and unsuccessful CSRD program proposals? What are the major weaknesses of the latter?
- What is the success rate of schools specifically targeted for the CSRD program (e.g., "low-achieving schools") in obtaining funding and how does this rate compare to other schools? What percentages of urban and rural schools are applying for and receiving CSRD funding?

The purpose of this report is to describe the findings from McREL's analysis of the CSRD application process and the characteristics of first round applicants in the Central Region states. McREL also collaborated with other regional laboratories on this policy research effort. Where appropriate, comparisons are made between the findings from the seven states in McREL's service region and from the 28 states represented in the cross-laboratory effort.[1]

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[1] Buttram,J.L., Castenada-English, P., Saenz, V., Hauser, B., Moats, S., Lane, B., Keller, B., Friedman, L., Zuckerman, D., Chang, J., Church, M., Davis, B., and Huebner, T. (2000, October). *Analysis of National Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program Competition.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

METHOD

This study involved analyzing information from both successful and unsuccessful CSRD applications collected from McREL's seven-state service region. Application guidelines, proposals, and scoring data were requested from the CSRD program coordinators in the Central Region states: Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Information regarding the characteristics of the applicant schools and the results of the application process was compiled in a database along with additional school information obtained from the National Center for Educational Statistics' Common Core of Data (CCD). Descriptive analyses focused on comparisons between the characteristics of the schools and proposals that were successful with those that were not.[2]

FINDINGS

Several aspects of the CSRD competition were examined and are summarized: the technical assistance offered by states provides a context for the application process; the applications received and awards made in round one comprise the data set studied; the scoring systems used by states establish relative priorities and determine success; and the school characteristics of successful and unsuccessful applicants provides evidence of whether target schools were reached.

Technical Assistance to LEAs

Various types of technical assistance were offered by state agencies to potential applicants during the CSRD competitions. McREL often collaborated with states in planning and/or delivering these services. Table 1 shows the types of assistance offered and the number of Central Region states that offered each type. As shown in the table, states offered multiple technical assistance options for applicants. All seven central states offered self-help resources and consultation via telephone and e-mail; all seven also held state- or regional-level planning workshops for potential applicants. Two states offered on-site technical assistance to potential applicants.

Table 1 also includes data from the 28 states that participated in the cross-laboratory study. While the availability of technical assistance was relatively higher among the Central Region states than among the larger cross-laboratory sample, the most frequent types of assistance offered were the same. It is important to note that these samples of states are not independent, however, since data from the states in McREL's region were also included in the larger cross-laboratory data set.

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[2] A second phase of this policy study was initially designed to identify and contact schools that were "targets" of the CSRD Program but did not apply for funding. However, the cross-laboratory team determined that such an effort would not yield useful information because of the amount of time that elapsed between the first round of CSRD funding and the proposed data collection.

TABLE 1
States Offering Technical Assistance to LEAs

TYPE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	STATES THAT OFFERED ASSISTANCE			
	Central Region (N=7)		Cross-Laboratory States* (N=28)	
Provided resources for schools (e.g., web sites, guides)	7	100%	20	71%
Telephone consultation (question/answer, referrals)	7	100	20	71
E-mail consultation (question/answer, referrals)	7	100	18	64
State level planning workshop	6	86	16	57
Regional level planning workshops	5	71	12	43
Showcase (model developer fair)	4	57	13	46
Site visits	2	29	8	29
District level planning workshops	0	0	3	11

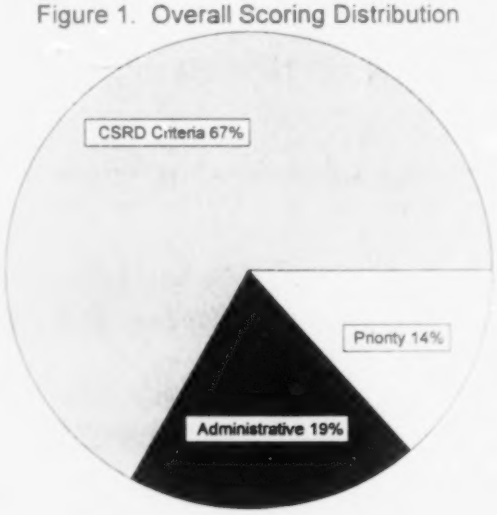
* Buttram et al. (2000)

Application Review Process

Proposal Scoring. The procedures, criteria, and numbers of reviewers used to score proposals varied by state. One state used five reviewers per proposal, most used three reviewers, and another used only two. Three states used essentially the same scoring rubrics. Comparisons across these disparate scoring systems were difficult. However, it was possible to compare the scoring rubrics and the relative emphasis that state systems placed on them.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of mean possible scores as percentages of the overall total. As shown in the figure, across states 67 percent of the available points were allocated to the nine CSRD criteria, 19 percent to administrative planning and budget, and 14 percent to priority points.

Figure 1. Overall Scoring Distribution



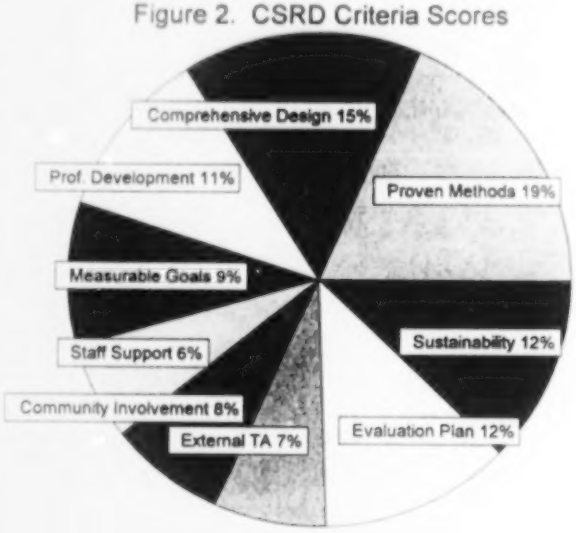
Priority points. All seven states offered priority or bonus points to applicants who provided evidence of high need or low-performing status. The maximum percent of priority points ranged from a low of 6 percent to as much as 22 percent of the overall proposal score.

Typically, schoolwide Title I schools were eligible for more points than were targeted Title I schools or non-Title I schools.

Although the number of applications in the Central Region that received funding as a result of receiving priority points is not known, the cross-regional study suggested that these points made little difference in awards (Buttram et al., 2000). One possible explanation is that the prospect of priority points may have encouraged schools to apply that were needy but otherwise not well-prepared to respond to the funding opportunity.

CSRD criteria. The largest proportion of the overall scoring was allocated to the nine CSRD criteria identified in the enabling legislation. Figure 2 shows the average relative distribution of points to these specific categories for the states in McREL's region. Note that because (a) the categories are not independent of one another and (b) the scoring rubrics used by states did not always directly align with specific categories, these data are approximations. As shown in the figure, the criteria given the greatest weight overall were "Employ innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics" (19%) and "Have a comprehensive design for effective school functioning including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parent involvement and school management" (15%). Those given the least weight were "Ensure support of school faculty, administrators and staff" (6%) and "Use high-quality external technical support and assistance from a comprehensive reform entity with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement" (7%).

Figure 2. CSRD Criteria Scores



Administrative. Administrative points were given for a variety of other reasons. These included a reasonable, cost effective budget; plans for project implementation; evidence of commitment by either the model developer or other key staff; project abstract; dissemination plans; and administrative details such as including a cover page and assurances.

Applicant Scores. As previously noted, while states provided detailed information about their scoring systems and procedures, the information available to McREL regarding the results of their reviews was limited. Several Central Region states reported complete item and reviewer ratings, while one reported only total scores and another did not report scores. Scores for all unsuccessful

applications were unavailable for two states, and for two applications in another state. Because of the limited nature of the data, analyses of applicant scores were not conducted. The cross-laboratory effort was able to analyze scoring data from 22 of the 28 states in its sample and found that the profiles for successful and unsuccessful applicants were very similar (Buttram et al., 2000).

Applications and Awards

Table 2 summarizes the first round CSRD applications and awards made in the seven Central Region states. As shown in the table, a total of 165 proposals were submitted on behalf of 196 schools and 56, or about one-third of them, were successful. In one state the application period was extended so that all applicants could have additional time to review and improve their initial proposals; in another, several rounds of competition were implemented. While those that were unsuccessful in the first round were allowed to resubmit and receive funding during subsequent rounds, only the first-round results were included in this study. The success rate for the 28-state cross-laboratory sample was somewhat higher, about 50 percent (Buttram et al., 2000). One likely reason why the overall success rate in the cross-laboratory sample was higher than that for the Central Region is that the cross-laboratory sample included data from subsequent rounds of funding.

TABLE 2
Central Region CSRD First Round Applications

N Row Percent	SUCCESSFUL	UNSUCCESSFUL	TOTAL
APPLICATIONS	56 34%	109 66%	165 100%
SCHOOLS	64 33%	132 67%	196 100%

Amount of Funding. The round-one awards in the sample totaled $3,920,663, or just over half of the funding available to the states in the first year of the Program. This amount translates to approximately $62,200 per participating school, although the average size of the awards varied substantially by state, ranging from about $102,000 per school to $28,700. The relatively small awards made to some schools were apparently the result of proposals submitted jointly by two or more schools. The amount of funding requested per school was comparable between successful and unsuccessful applicants.

School Reform Models. A wide variety of models were proposed by the applicants. Multiple models were frequently identified, which allowed schools to select complimentary approaches and components that best meet their needs. Those specific CSRD models mentioned most often included: Success for All, Roots and Wings (often in conjunction with Success for All), Accelerated Schools, Coalition of Essential Schools, Expeditionary Learning, and Multiple Intelligences. Many schools also proposed "homegrown" models of their own design. However, these homegrown models were

generally less successful in securing awards. A separate report describing the population of alternative models in the region and factors that might guide services to these schools was recently prepared by McREL.[3]

School Characteristics

Selected characteristics of the central state applicant schools obtained from the NCES Common Core of Data are summarized in Table 3. For these analyses only data from those six states that provided information for both successful and unsuccessful proposals were included. As shown in the table, nearly three-fourths (74%) of the applicant schools serve students at the elementary level. The remaining schools are about equally divided between the middle (11%) and high school levels (9%); a smaller percent (6%) serve various other combinations of grades. Approximately half (47%) of the applicants are located in rural communities or small towns and a third (34%) are in urban settings. There were no significant differences in the distributions of successful and unsuccessful applicants on the basis of either grade levels or locale.

School Size. Overall, applicant schools averaged 419.6 students and 26.2 FTE teachers, or about 16 students per teacher. Although the student/teacher ratios were comparable for successful and unsuccessful schools, applications from smaller schools appeared to be slightly more successful. Unsuccessful schools averaged 450.9 students and 28.2 teachers while successful schools averaged 354.0 students and 21.9 teachers. Both of these differences were marginally significant.[4]

Student Ethnicity. As shown in Table 3, slightly more than one-third (36%) of the students from all applicant schools are members of minority groups. Black and hispanic students comprise the largest percentages of minority students (14% each), followed by American Indian/Alaskan natives (7%) and Asians (2%). While the percentage of minority students was somewhat higher among successful schools than unsuccessful schools (43% versus 33%), the difference was not statistically significant.

Title I Eligibility. Nearly half (46.2%) of all students in the applicant schools were eligible for free or reduced lunch. This percentage was marginally higher among successful schools (51.6%) than unsuccessful schools (43.6%).[5] Table 3 also shows the percentages of Title I schools and schools identified for school improvement identified in the applications. Nearly all (97%) of the funded schools for which information was available are Title I and most of them were identified as in need of improvement.

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[3] Clark, G., Apthorp, H., Van Buhler, R., Dean, C. & Barley, Z. (2000, August). Beyond the List: Schools Selecting Alternative CSR Models. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

[4] $t_{cc} = 1.94$, $p = .05$ and $t_{cc} = 2.1$, $p = .04$, respectively.

[5] $t_{cc} = 2.10$, $p = .04$.

Cross-laboratory Schools. The school characteristics of Central Region applicants were generally consistent with those from the 28 state cross-laboratory sample. In both groups, awards were made most often to schools at the elementary grade levels, schools that have Title I programs, and schools that serve relatively high numbers of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch programs. Given the predominately rural nature of the Central Region, it is not surprising that the schools in the cross-laboratory states were more often located in urban settings (Buttram et al., 2000). No information on school size and student ethnicity was available for the cross-laboratory schools.

TABLE 3
Selected Characteristics of CSRD First Round Applicant Schools*

CHARACTERISTIC	SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS (N=132)		UNSUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS (N=63)		ALL APPLICANTS (N=195)	
	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER
GRADE LEVELS						
Primary (PK-6)	76%	47	73%	93	74%	140
Middle (6-9)	8	5	13	16	11	21
High (9-12)	11	7	8	10	9	17
Other	5	3	6	9	6	12
LOCALE						
Urban (large and mid-sized city)	36%	22	34%	43	34%	65
Suburban (urban fringe and large town)	10	6	23	29	19	35
Rural (small town and rural)	54	33	44	56	47	89
MEAN NUMBER OF STUDENTS**		354.0		450.9		419.6
ETHNICITY						
White	57%		67%		64%	
Black	10		15		14	
Hispanic	19		12		14	
Asian/Pacific Islander	2		1		2	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	12		4		7	
MEAN FREE/REDUCED LUNCH**	51.6%		43.6%		46.2%	
MEAN NUMBER OF FTE TEACHERS**		21.9		28.2		26.2
MEAN STUDENT/TEACHER RATIO		16.0		15.7		15.8
EDUCATIONAL STATUS						
Title I building	97%		79%		85%	
Identified for school improvement	85		51		60	

* CCD (1998) data availability varied; the actual number of schools represented for a particular characteristic may be less than the possible N for the sample. ** Significant difference between funded and non-funded applicant schools.

SUMMARY

A study of the first round of the CSRD competition in the seven Central Region states was conducted, based on the applications submitted, state guidelines, and information from the National Center for Educational Statistics. Comparisons with comparable data from the 28-state cross-laboratory study were also made and were generally consistent with those from the Central Region.

Various types of technical assistance were offered by state agencies to potential applicants during the competitions. The findings show that the application process varied substantially among the states in terms of the number of reviewers who participated, the scoring rubrics applied, and the average funds awarded. While all applications requested at least $50,000 in support, the amount awarded per school was sometimes less than the minimum because of joint proposals.

Analyses of the state scoring systems revealed that, across states, 67 percent of the available points were allocated to the nine CSRD criteria specified in the enabling legislation, 19 percent to administrative planning and budget considerations, and 14 percent to priority points based on need. Among CSRD criteria, the greatest weight was given to applications that employed innovative strategies and proven methods based on reliable research and effective practices and that presented a comprehensive design for effective school functioning.

Nearly three-fourths of the 195 applicant schools were elementary schools and about half were located in rural communities or small towns. About one-third of the 165 first round applications in the Central Region were successful. The characteristics of applicant schools appeared to be consistent with the competition guidelines. As compared with unsuccessful schools, successful schools had slightly fewer students and teachers, served a greater percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and more often demonstrated educational need through their involvement in Title I and school improvement efforts.